

The Republican Party—The Message.

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S P E E C H

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OF

ION, EMORY B. POTTEL, OF NEW YORK

Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 31, 1859.

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SPEECH OF MR. POTTLE.

Chairman, in the hour allotted me, I shall follow the example of other gentlemen, and a little upon many subjects having reference to the public welfare; and as several gentlemen have indulged in comments upon one or other of the two great political parties in the Union, I shall venture a few thoughts upon the Republican party, its principles, and objects which it is seeking to attain. It hardly seems necessary for me to say I speak for no one but myself, for I think man, here or elsewhere, would presume to own a platform for that party, or enunciate a plan of action, with the expectation that they should be considered binding upon any but himself.

The right of free and full discussion, which belongs to every member of the party, citizen of the country, invites every gentleman upon this floor to say, or leave unsaid, every topic of public policy, whatever to his judgment shall seem discreet and proper; when said, he only, and not the party, is responsible. And while there is no necessity to go further than this, there also is no right. When the Republican party met at Philadelphia in 1856, to nominate a candidate for the Presidency, it was represented by delegates, authorized as they were elected, not only to perform that duty, but to declare to the world the principles by which that party should be guided. They performed that duty, and, in my judgment, performed it well. Those principles must necessarily continue until the Republican party again be represented in a convention having power to modify or change the platform agreed upon. And, sir, I do not anticipate an event until the representatives of the party shall again be assembled to nominate a candidate to be supported for the Presidency in

1860. And, sir, until then, I, for one, am willing to wait, with full confidence that the representatives of the party (representatives, who will everywhere be chosen for their prudence and ability) will then not only retain and reassert all that four years' experience shall have proved correct, and for the interest of the whole country, but that they will also modify any of the present platform, which experience, new issues, and altered circumstances, shall require, in order to meet the wants and interests of the country. I think, sir, the present platform one which was well and carefully considered before it was adopted; and that it met, frankly, justly, and in a spirit of broad nationality, all the issues of that time; and whatever changes may become necessary, if any, I feel full confidence that the same will be truly said of the platform upon which the campaign of 1860 will be fought.

And now, sir, a few words upon the character and aims of the Republican party. I confess that I have been pained at times by hearing gentlemen talk of the Republican party as a mere Anti-Slavery party. Sir, I desire to say that, while this question of the rights of colored men, and of the effect of Slavery upon free white labor, is, and will be, second to no other, there are still other great questions upon which no party can, if it would, be silent. It must of necessity speak out, and have a policy upon each and all of them. The wheels of Government must go on; they cannot await the issue of any single idea, however important; and, sir, a careful consideration of our platform will be sufficient to convince the bitterest opponent of Republicanism that we have not shrunk from or avoided the declaration of our policy upon any question of public interest; and that we

take strong and high grounds upon all of them.

And, sir, while we hear so much from gentlemen about the encroachments of the Republican party upon the South, in its past action, and of its tendency to that direction in the future, I would ask some one of the many intelligent gentlemen from that section to descend from wholesale assertion to simple fact, and point out a single act of this party, or a single plank in its platform, that will justify these charges, so often made. I do not ask for intemperate expressions sometimes made by members of the Republican party, but for the acts and creed of the party. It is for these alone that it can fairly be held responsible. If there has been any such action, I, for one, wish to express my regret. If there is anything aggressive in our platform, I desire to labor to get rid of it. I gave my adhesion to this party, in the belief that it was *national*, in the broadest and best sense of that term; and in spite of declamation here and elsewhere, I shall still entertain that belief, until I see proof to the contrary. Assuming, sir, that I have understood correctly our platform, and what we aim to accomplish as a party, I assert that there is not a sentiment contained in our creed, or held by any considerable number of those who claim to be Republicans, but what is clearly within the limits of the Constitution, and for the public good—calculated to benefit alike all sections of the country. Nothing but what has been held by one or the other great parties of the country, and sometimes by both, and sanctioned by long usage, without a charge or thought that it was sectional and aggressive.

We seek a just and economical administration of the Government;

A wise, conciliatory, and just foreign policy;

A system of revenue duties, which, while it supplies the needful expenses of Government, shall at the same time yield incidental protection to industry against the cheap labor of Europe;

A system of improvement, not only upon our ocean coast, but upon our inland lakes and rivers and other great avenues of trade, which will strengthen commerce, and insure the safety of our property and lives of our people in time of peace, and serve for military transportations in time of war;

A chain of railroads which shall connect the Atlantic and Pacific, binding our wide-spread empire with the strong bands of common interest, and giving us the carrying trade of the world;

A policy in the disposal of the public lands which shall give to the pioneer, the actual settler, a homestead, an advantage over the mere speculator; and thus, instead of town plats and cities on paper, build up real towns and cities, making the wilderness literally blossom like a garden, spreading civilization and general prosperity over the land;

Laws and a policy for Utah, which shall put an end to the hideous deformity upon our institutions which disgraces us in the eyes of the world;

A constant and implicit observance of the rights of the several States, according to the understanding of Jefferson and the early fathers of the Republic.

Now, sir, I ask Southern men—for I speak them in this matter—what in all this is sectional, that is not for the interest of the South as well as the North, the East as well as the West?

If it is said that I have said nothing in regard to the policy of the party, as to Negro slavery, I will add that our policy upon that subject is as simple and as time-honored as either of the other planks I have named. It is simply to let it alone where State rights protect it, and refuse our sanction to it and oppose its entrance into any Territory where it has no such shield to guard it. If you say that this policy is sectional, I reply, then, that you, not we, have made it so; for it is but a brief period since the parties South, as well as North, held this identical doctrine in common—even to insist that it was not within the power of Congress to legalize Slavery in the Territories. I know that my friend from Kentucky, [Mr. MARSHALL] in his speech the other day, claimed that Dred Scott case had now settled that question otherwise. He is a good lawyer, and, I think, must have relied upon the word of the President in this matter. Had he examined the Supreme Court, in that case, merely, he could hardly have failed to notice that the Supreme Court, in that case, merely, decided that Dred Scott was a negro; that a negro is not a citizen of the State of Missouri according to the laws of that State, and cannot sue in that court, and therefore the court had no jurisdiction of the case. Whatever individual judges chose to say, (after they thus disposed of the case before them,) in the political questions of the day, would indicate their opinions upon such questions; but more amounts to an adjudication of these questions, than would the speeches of the gentleman and myself upon the same topics.

Nor can they be taken as a certain indication of what the court will decide, should such questions ever come properly before it. Before that time, the present members may change their opinions, or, in the course of nature, yield their places to others; or the court be so reorganized as to give to all sections of the country proper access to, and a fair representation in it. Nor yet does the statement of the President, that the Supreme Court, in that decision, has made Slavery legal in the Territories, increase respect either for the alleged decision or the Executive. And I have only to add, upon this point, that an attempt to legislate in affirmation of the opinion of the judges in that case, will meet my objection while a member of this honorable

and I hope will meet the opposition of every member of the Republican party.

To the complaint that we of the North absorb all other issues in this one in relation to Negro Slavery, and that we are constantly agitating upon this question, my reply is, that you have forced this issue upon us, and still force it upon us, with a determination that gives us little time to do anything else but resist your encroachments. You cannot deny that we of the North have long sought repose upon this vexed question, and to that end made various, and, to us, humiliating compromises, every one of which you agreed should be a "finality." Where are they now? What became of the compromise of 1787? Swallowed up in that of 1820. Who made the change of policy, and who got the benefit? The names of the slave States gained by that change would be a full answer.

But, sir, not to dwell upon this, and passing over Florida and Texas, what has become of the great "finality" of 1850? Before the ink was dry with which it was written, you began to agitate the question of the repeal of the compromise of 1820, which you accomplished in 1854—thus sweeping away the last legislative barrier to Slavery, and followed that, in 1856, with what the President calls a decision which makes "Kansas (and the other Territories) as much slave States as South Carolina or Georgia." (I suppose he must mean States *out of the Union*, for they are not yet in it.) Now, sir, if gentlemen call it agitation to resist the progress, from the acknowledged doctrine that Slavery, under our Constitution, could not exist in any of the Territories, to the present one, that by that same Constitution it exists in all of them, then, sir, I have only to add, that I trust there is no member of the Republican party who will not continue that resistance, even though agitation should follow which should rock the earth upon which we stand. That agitation which results merely from the defence of constitutional rights is neither to be deprecated nor dreaded. It is one you can at any time stop, by merely ceasing the aggressions which cause it.

In this connection, I desire to say a few words in regard to a project which is before the House, and has attracted some attention in the country. I allude to the proposition for authorizing the people of the Territories to elect their Territorial officers; and I frankly say that this plan commends itself to my judgment, and is, I think, entirely consistent with our platform as Republicans. It leaves with Congress precisely the power that it now possesses over the Territories, but takes from the President the appointment of these officers, and transfers their election to the people—a change which is in accordance with the principles of our Government, and which takes from the Executive a portion of that patronage of which he has far too much; which is always, under any Administration,

liable to abuse; and which has under the present one been abused, as every one who is familiar (and who is not?) with the wrongs and outrages of Kansas knows; and which enables the President to thwart the will of the people. Sir, a measure which has for its object the correction of these evils will, I hope, meet the approbation of Congress, when it shall be reached for a vote.

Nor is this a new and untried experiment. The people of the Territories already elect a portion of their Territorial officers, such, for instance, as members of the Territorial Legislature; and why not allow them to elect the rest? If the power is safely confided to them in one instance, why not in the other? I can see no danger resulting to any one but the Executive. It certainly does deprive him of a large amount of patronage, and that, too, at a point where it always can be, as it always has been, used to its fullest extent, for the advantage of his party; and wholly without reference to the wishes of the people or their welfare. I trust, sir, this broad declaration is fully justified by the facts. I am sure that the history of Kansas alone would demonstrate its justice. But I do not desire to fight over our battles in that direction, and shall trust to the memory of gentlemen for the truth of what I have said. There seems to be a strange confusion of ideas upon both sides of the House upon this question. While the organ of the Administration (the *Union*) denounces it as dangerous to the Government, and proclaims that our greatest danger is from the encroachment by the people upon the powers of the Government, my friend from Maine, [Mr. WASHBURN,] watchful to warn us of this new danger, assumes, as I understand his argument, that it is neither more nor less than a relinquishment of our whole platform, in this, that it leaves "the people of the Territories to decide for themselves whether or not they will have what they (the Republicans) declare to be an unmitigated and gigantic evil," to wit, Human Slavery. It may be that it is my fault that I am unable to see this in the light in which the gentleman has put it. I should differ with any conclusion of his with great reluctance; but I am unable to see what the election of a Territorial Governor, and of Territorial judges and sheriffs, has to do with legalizing Slavery, except, perhaps, the negative power of the Governor's veto. The *law-making* power, the Legislature, is now elected by the people. The additional officers which it is proposed that the people shall elect find their duties, not in making, but in executing the laws; and I am as unable to realize the loss of our platform, and all the evils connected therewith, as likely to follow this change, as I am to enter into the fears of the Democratic organ, that our most imminent danger is in allowing the people to govern themselves. And I repeat, that it is precisely for the reason that the Executive officers of the Territories are far

more likely to execute the will of the President who appoints them, than of the people, of whom they are independent, that I would make the change, and compel them to "derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," and dependent upon them for their election. In my own State, sir, we have adopted this principle, and made it applicable to nearly every officer in the State; and I should never have doubted that it was democratic, or realized our danger from too much power with the people, but for the timely warning to which I have alluded.

From all that I have said on this point, I deduce the following propositions:

1. It is yielding no right that Congress ever exercised in the government of the Territories.

2. It is a right which belongs to the people, and therefore should be exercised by them instead of the President.

3. All experience proves that laws are best executed when the officer is made directly responsible to those over whom he exercises authority.

4. This change has no relation to the question of Slavery whatever, except so far as it insures a just and impartial administration of the laws.

Good and sufficient reasons, to my mind, all of them, for the proposed change. And, sir, I now say, that I would not only in this instance, but in every one that presented itself, strike down the over-swollen patronage of the President, until he has reached a point where he should feel that he is the people's servant, and not their master; where he should be made to know he cannot trample upon the rights of any portion of the people with impunity, because of his invincible armor of public patronage.

Not desiring to be misunderstood in this matter, I would say to my friend from Maine, [Mr. WASHBURN,] that I am prepared to vote for his way of keeping Slavery out of the Territories whenever he shall get it ready; but until then, I would like to see the people of the Territories relieved of Governors, judges, and sheriffs, selected from a throng of hungry officer-seekers, and sent to *force* Slavery upon them against their will. I shall assume as self-evident, that the will of the people, clearly expressed against Slavery, in every Territory, will have the effect to keep it out; for whatever theoretical right the slaveholder may set up, under the Dred Scott case or otherwise, to go into such a Territory with his slave property, self-interest will keep him out. He will not go where the change from a Territorial to a State Government may work the loss of all his slaves. Kansas, Nebraska, and Oregon, stand as examples of the truth of these positions. The will of the people in each of these, practically exercised, has, I think, had quite as much to do in preparing them for free States, as the often-repeated assurance that Congress would keep Slavery out of the Territories. My faith in words is great—

in fact, unbounded; but I would not, after all, repress or condemn practical action. I would not quarrel with the people of the Territories, or call them hard names, because they will not wait for us to exorcise Slavery from their borders.

But, sir, I have devoted much more time to this matter than I had intended, and shall occupy the remainder of my time in remarks upon the President's message. To that portion of that long-winded document where the President urges the necessity of economy, I most heartily respond. No reform can be more needed; with an expenditure which has far outstripped that of any former Administration, and a rapidly accumulated national debt, the President may well talk about economy; and I here pledge him my vote for every just measure calculated to relieve the country from the present wasteful and extravagant Administration of the Government. But, sir, "faith without works is dead." Let us see what "works" the President recommends in this direction.

First, the letting of mail contracts with reference merely to the transportation of the mails, and without reference to the running of coaches or other vehicles for the transportation of passengers, is a good and needed reform, and one I will cheerfully vote for.

Second, a "modification" of the franking privilege. Sir, I will vote for this, also; and the "modification" which I desire is to abolish it altogether. It is a useless, wasteful expense, yielding no corresponding benefit, and devolves upon members of Congress a tax that prevents a proper discharge of their other duties. And, sir, I would go further; I would reform the present unequal and unjust system of mileage, and cut up, root and branch, the foolish and corrupt system of book-making by the Government; and, in my judgment, these few simple and needed reforms will save to the Government more than five million dollars annually. But, sir, I cannot consent to raise the present letter postage, in order to make the Post Office Department self-sustaining. Abstractly, I can see no reason why this Department should be self-sustaining, more than any of the others—the War and Navy Departments, for instance. But I trust that if the reforms above indicated were faithfully carried out, they would more than make up the difference of revenue which would accrue from the proposed increase. There is no right dearer to the people than that of communicating through the mail, none that tends more to increase their social and moral qualities; and in no way could you impose a tax upon them that would be so severely felt, as by this increase. I would sooner vote to reduce the expenses of the executive and legislative departments to make up a deficit in the mail service, than to increase the rate of postage on letters.

Another great and needed reform recommended by the President, and one which I am

anxious to vote for, is a revision of the tariff upon the plan recommended by the President—not the Secretary.

But, sir, as I do not now intend to make a tariff speech, I shall pass on to other topics discussed in the message; and having stated those points upon which I agree with the President, and intend to support his policy, I desire to say a few words in relation to those upon which I disagree with him.

Sir, I was not a little disappointed, after listening to these smooth words of the President about retrenchment and reform, to hear him follow with recommendations, that we should buy Cuba, at a cost, I suppose, of not less than two to four hundred million dollars; or if Spain would not sell, that we should take it at whatever cost. That we should take military occupation of Mexico and Central America, involving first a large and permanent increase of both the army and navy; a war with the citizens of those countries, and probably with half of Europe; and that in order to begin these splendid operations we should place in the President's hands, to be used according to his *discretion*, \$30,000,000. Now, sir, these operations could hardly cost the Government less than eight hundred million dollars.

But, then, the President tells us that there are compensating benefits. In the case of Cuba, we are to get rid of the African slave trade; and in that of Mexico, we are but collecting our debts. Sir, I think it was Mr. Buchanan's opinion, in the case of Texas, that we should *decrease* Slavery by *increasing* the amount of slave territory and the *demand* for slave labor; and I am not surprised that, as President, he urges the same argument for the acquisition of Cuba. But it would, indeed, be a matter of surprise, if any person could now be cheated by such an argument. Why did not our Southern friends back the President in this view of suppressing the slave trade, and urge the acquisition of Cuba on these grounds, instead of treating us to speeches about manifest destiny, and our need of more territory? Need of more territory! Why, sir, we have got so much now that, if it were equally apportioned, it would give to each man, woman, and child, something over three square miles—sufficient breathing space to prevent immediate suffocation. Sir, the greatest present evil is too much territory. This it is which makes our Government the most expensive in the world. If we would but pay attention to our own affairs, and let our neighbors alone; develop the resources of the country we have, and make stronger the strained cords of union and fraternity, by unity of interest, instead of reaching out for more territory, and bringing in foreign and conflicting elements, how much should we have advanced in all that makes a nation truly great!

In regard to Mexico, the President is only anxious to save the people's money. He merely wants to collect some debts which Mexico owes

us. I do not know exactly the amount of indebtedness, but it strikes me that the plan for collection is of a kind so likely to be expensive, that if it is a question of money merely, we had better wait until Mexico can or will pay, or give her the debt even; but, sir, this is not the question. After all the smooth talk, it requires no skill to see that "this is the voice of Jacob, but the hand of Esau;" that while we are flattered with the promise of an end to the African slave trade, and the realization of our just dues from Mexico; that, in plain, straight-forward language, and language more befitting the President, we want more territory, and we want it for a particular purpose. The settlement and pacification of Kansas, in which (according to the message) the President took so conspicuous a part, and the unmistakable signs given by all our present Territories, of excluding Slavery, makes the President anxious to buy or get additional territory for the development of the Southern "institution"—enough to give it a preponderance if it stays in the Union, or scope and room if it goes out.

But, sir, where are we to get these untold millions of money? The Treasury is empty; so much so that you cannot even pay the workmen about the Capitol regularly. The revenue is not increasing materially, while the debts are. To the \$40,000,000 borrowed, we shall have to add \$40,000,000 more, most likely, before the revenue will meet current expenses. Where, then, do you propose to get the money to buy territory? Sir, it would be much more in keeping with our condition, if the President had recommended the sale of some of the territory we have, in order to carry on the Government, and stop our debts. I know that the failure to get Cuba would disappoint my friend from Ohio, [Mr. Cox,] whose taste runs so much to cheap molasses. Could not the gentleman reach the same object, and effectually get sweetened by the much more simple process of repealing the present sugar duties?

But, sir, I have an objection to the message, stronger, to my mind, than any I have glanced at; and that is, its utter lack of fairness and manliness—its manifest attempt to pander to every sectional and factional feeling in the country. To the advocates of protection it holds out the blandishments of a tariff, and puts the great free-trade party of the Union upon the broad Whig doctrine of "specific duties." To the reformer, the President talks of retrenchment, at the same time asking that \$30,000,000 may be placed in his hands, and subject to his discretion, with which to begin the reform, which will only be made perfect by buying or taking all that adjoins us by land or is near us in the ocean, at an expense of untold millions. To the opponents of Human Slavery, he points to the acquisition of Cuba as a sure and certain means of accomplishing their long-deferred purpose of wholly stopping the slave trade; while the advocate of Slavery

can find in that same great project, and its yoke-fellow of Mexico, his long-coveted extension of slave territory. To the great class of "manifest-destiny" men, the realization of the great "Monroe doctrine" (whatever that may be) in full and perfect operation; and to the restless spirits of our country, and filibusters generally, that "good time coming" for which they have hoped and prayed, but hardly dared expect. To the army and navy, all the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war," not forgetting, however, the assurance to the peacefully inclined—and to Spain, Mexico, and Central America, in particular—that the policy and intentions of this country are all of a pacific and friendly character; and, finally, to our citizens upon the "Pacific slope," that we should immediately open avenues to them through our own territory and through that of our neighbors.

Sir, a message that thus rubs up to brightness every pimple of prejudice and excitement, and strings together incongruous and inconsistent promises and recommendations, can have but one object; and that, I think, can be none other than to collect together under "different and dissimilar banners," to use the metaphor of my colleague, [Mr. THOMPSON,] an army which, if not quite equal to the conquest of Cuba, Mexico, and Central America, shall at least be equal to the great campaign of 1860. And what an army it will be, when free traders and protectionists, the opponents of Slavery and the Slavery extensionists, the peace society and the men of war, the conservative and the filibuster, and the economist and the hunter of spoils, shall gather with their "dissimilar banners" under the broad flag of the Administration Democracy! Sir, as this is the first message of its kind, I am sure that all well-wishers of our country and our country's honor will join in the hope that it may be the last; and that this Administration of extravagance, bankruptcy, broken pledges, and filibustering projects, may receive, at the hands of the people, that justice it has so richly earned. I shall gladly vote against the several projects recommended, in the order in which they reach us.

The severe criticisms of the European press on these remarkable projects were doubtless made upon the presumption that the President meant what he said, and, in that view, are both national and just. But does any member of this body believe that the President expects to either buy or take Cuba? That he expects us, for that purpose, to place \$30,000,000 in his hands? That he expects to take armed occupation of Mexico and Central America? And yet honorable gentlemen, day after day, give us

speeches, as though all these matters were foregone conclusions. The gentleman from Missouri, [Mr. ANDERSON,] the other day, told us that these projects were not only feasible, but, as I understood him, were matters of "inevitable destiny," which it was useless to resist. The honorable member from Ohio [Mr. COX] found Cuba literally flowing with bread and molasses; and its acquisition must of necessity prove acceptable to the people of Ohio. The speech of the eloquent gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. AVERY] was a whole epic in praise of the charms of Cuba, arriving at the conclusion that she had so many desirable resources, and such great wealth, that we could well afford to take her, while we must take Mexico for exactly the opposite reason, namely, because she had nothing to pay her debts, and was wholly unable to take care of herself; while the other gentleman from Tennessee, [Mr. ATKINS,] who looked upon Slavery as the greatest civilizing and Christianizing institution in the world, did not believe we could get Cuba. Well, sir, I trust, if these speeches do not serve to induce Cuba and Mexico to rush to our arms, they will at least show to the constituencies of these gentlemen their fervor in support of the President, and their unquestioned desire to raise new issues, which shall obliterate from the public mind the recollection of old ones; and that, I trust, is the extent of their expectations, or of the President's.

But, sir, these recommendations upon the part of the President, and the sanction which they seem to find in this House and in the Senate, not only create a restlessness on the part of our own people, but they are looked upon as insulting to the other nations interested; and, for whatever purpose intended, may yet cost this Government untold millions of money, and hundreds of thousands of valuable lives. When we get Cuba without these results, it will be after we can show a better reason for it than simply that it is a rich island, which it would be convenient for us to have. Sir, you need only refer to the manner in which England and France met that same argument, when offered by Russia in reference to Turkey, to read the inevitable result of this matter, if seriously insisted upon—a result which, if it serves no other purpose, may undeceive us as to the extent of our power to trample upon the rights of our neighbors.

We are strong, we are prosperous, as we are. Why can we not be content with the full measure of our blessings, and not seek to interfere with the rights and blessings of other nations, whether they be greater or less than our own?